

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Appropriation Committee Members,

My name is Kelly Hicks-Earley and I am a mother of 3 young children residing in Winchester, Connecticut. I moved to this community in the summer of 2012. At that time, I did not know anyone here or have a connection to any resources. My oldest daughter was 3 years old and as I called every preschool in the area to enroll her, I found that they had already been filled for the following fall. I felt as if I was going to lose the opportunity to give her an early education experience that is so necessary to prepare her for the increasing demands of thriving in public education. However, the Family Resource Center was able to help us and assisted us in enrolling her in the School Readiness preschool program at Batcheller School. My daughter did go on to thrive in public schools socially and academically, despite attending a school system that is chronically underfunded and lacking in necessary educational resources.

Over the following years, the Family Resource Center has become the biggest resource I have ever utilized. My second daughter and son have attended their Parents as Teachers playgroup regularly, which has given them the social skills for a smooth transition into preschool, and then into kindergarten. As a parent who was completely unfamiliar with the area, I have made nearly all of my friends through this program. Today, I can say with complete confidence that I have a very strong support network that would not be there if it were not for the services of the Family Resource Center.

One of the most valuable aspects of the work that the FRC does, is encouraging parent involvement in their children's lives and educations. As a low income, rural community, parent involvement is a real struggle for our school system. Our FRC has worked passionately and tirelessly to change this. I can attest that I am a parent who has attended their Parent Voices committee meetings, then participated in the grant funded Parents Supporting Educational Excellence program organized by the FRC, and then used the tools from these experiences to found an educational advocacy group in our community called Parents For Education. The result of the Parents for Education mission is that Winchester will support education through training, advocacy, and community involvement. Recently, all of the chair members of this group have been asked to run for the Winchester Board of Education as a result of our work and passion for positive change in a struggling community. As you can see, parent leadership is strongly rooted in the work of our Family Resource Center.

In 2016, I became a single mother. They say that it takes a village to raise a child, and as a single mom of 3, I understand firsthand how accurate this statement is. Our Family Resource Center IS the connection to bringing that village together. They are a major asset to the families in this community and their work is absolutely invaluable.

Our FRC cannot continue to build parent leaders and provide the resources they have to the children and families of Winchester with budget cuts. It is crucial to our community that they remain a line item on the budget and do not have their funding cut. Such actions will drastically impact the momentum of school improvement and parent leadership, which is the foundation of improving our struggling community. Winchester cannot afford to lose or cut the work of our Family Resource Center.

When I meet families from the generation before mine, they typically share their positive memories of taking their own children the playgroup at the FRC and the lifetime connections that they've made through this program. At that time, I am always proud to report the growth of

our FRC's work and the numerous positive experiences my family has encountered with their support. There are many stories like mine in our community. Thank you for taking the time to read mine and considering the impact of such decisions.

Sincerely,  
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